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U.S. Farm Labor Bureau

Report of the Farm Labor
Bureau of the U.S. ...

[Washington]

[1924]

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MAR 19 1924

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR.

JAMES J. DAVIS, Secretary.

U. S. EMPLOYMENT SERVICE.

FRANCIS I. JONES, Director General.

Report of the Farm Labor Bureau of the
U. S. Employment Service.

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR,
U. S. EMPLOYMENT SERVICE,
Washington, December 8, 1923.

HON. JAMES J. DAVIS,

Secretary of Labor, Washington, D. C.

MY DEAR MR. SECRETARY: I have the honor to submit herewith a report of the work done by the Farm Labor Bureau of this service from January 1, 1923, to November 30, 1923, inclusive. I am sure it will interest you to know that in the demands for help, opportunities for service fulfilled, and the number of laborers handled the Farm Labor Bureau so far this year has surpassed the records of previous years.

The activities of the Farm Labor Bureau have been extended over a far greater area than in other years. The 1923 work was carried on in one-third of the States of the Union, but these States embraced fully one-half of the actual area of the United States. The scope of the work included the handling of a number of the major farm crops. The total number of men recruited and distributed for seasonal farm labor this year by the bureau was 161,083. This is practically 50 per cent greater work than has been performed by the Farm Labor Bureau in any previous year of its history. The establishing of a permanent service at Fort Worth, Tex., in May of this year, proved of inestimable value to the agricultural interests of the State, and particularly to the cotton sections. This office alone supplied to the cotton fields 41,279 men—a distinct accomplishment.

Viewed in the light of work performed, the expenditure of the bureau was extremely low, not exceeding \$30,000. If the continuous insistent demands made upon this service by all the agricultural sections of the country are to be met, it will be necessary that additional funds be appropriated in order to provide for the extension and development of the Farm Labor Bureau. In order to bring the Farm Labor Bureau up to where it can perform the maximum

amount of service to the country, an appropriation of \$80,000 should be made for this particular activity of the U. S. Employment Service.

The Farm Labor Bureau has not been able to meet all requirements for help that have been made upon it. To some sections from which very urgent calls for service came the bureau was forced to turn a deaf ear. In some of the agricultural territory entered it was able to render only limited aid, because funds would not permit the making of a thorough preliminary survey or provide an adequate organization of field men to recruit, direct, and distribute equitably the necessary supply of labor and also afford the necessary publicity. However, in vast territories the Farm Labor Bureau was able to furnish full service by putting a complete organization in the field, maintaining adequate temporary offices at strategic points, thus recruiting sufficient help, directing it to proper distribution points, and then moving it in an orderly manner so as to meet the individual community needs. In all districts where service was rendered the bureau received full cooperation from the State labor commissioners, who are also the Federal directors of this service, the public employment services of the several States (to which this service makes financial contribution), as well as from the county extension agents, the chambers of commerce, bankers and business organizations, and the individual farmers.

The central office of the Farm Labor Bureau is located at Kansas City, Mo. While this office is the headquarters of the Farm Labor Bureau, it placed 2,359 farm laborers at general monthly and yearly work. The branch service at Sioux City, Iowa, directed 1,724 general farm hands to work in this territory. The Fort Worth, Tex., office during the first five months of its existence located 607 men on farms for monthly and yearly labor. The locating of general farm hands on the farms of the country is a highly important work, but in the main such service must be performed by the regular State and Federal public employment services, which more nearly cover the field. The Farm Labor Bureau office can serve only the territory directly tributary to its permanent office with this class of labor. It is, therefore, considered to no extent in the program of this service.

The essential work of the Farm Labor Bureau is, and properly should be, the handling of seasonal farm laborers. It is of primary importance, because not only the well-being of the farmers but the welfare and business prosperity of the entire country demand that proper care be taken of important corps. Securing and directing of seasonal laborers can not be done successfully by the farmers themselves. Since it involves the employment of a vast army of laborers covering many States, it becomes an interstate affair, and therefore can be handled most effectively only by a Federal agency. The suc-

cessful handling of seasonal labor calls for an organization that specializes in recruiting large numbers of men, that understands how to distribute these men in proper numbers, at the right time and to the exact places where needed, with the last possible lost motion. This is the real function and work of the Farm Labor Bureau.

In order to handle seasonal labor successfully, the Labor Bureau must know acreages and crop conditions. Its preliminary work must be thorough and accurate, for upon the facts, figures, and general information secured depends the success of the activities of the bureau. This year the seasonal labor activities of the bureau covered a period of about nine months, beginning in April and continuing throughout December, with the intensive period from June 1 to November 15.

Early in the spring the berry-picking industry in Texas and the Ozark districts of Arkansas and Missouri makes its appeal for help. About June the wheat harvest begins in Texas, and as the grain ripens the work progresses northward through Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Iowa, South Dakota, Minnesota, North Dakota, Montana, Washington, Idaho, and through Oregon and Colorado to a slight extent. Temporary offices in charge of one or more special agents of the bureau for the recruiting, directing, and distributing of seasonal labor were maintained for periods ranging from two to six weeks at important points from Corpus Christi, Tex., to Spokane, Wash. The field offices, which numbered more than 50, were as follows: Amarillo, Dallas, Waco, Wichita Falls, San Antonio, Corpus Christi, Waxahachie, and Plainview, Tex.; Enid, Okla.; Fort Smith and Texarkana, Ark.; St. Louis and Kansas City, Mo.; Wellington, Kiowa, Wichita, Pratt, Hutchinson, Great Bend, Salina, and Colby, Kans.; Omaha, Lincoln, McCook, Nebraska City, Hastings, and Grand Island, Nebr.; Des Moines and Sioux City, Iowa; Sioux Falls, Huron, Redfield, Watertown, and Aberdeen, S. Dak.; Minneapolis and Moorhead, Minn.; Oakes, Fargo, Jamestown, Grand Forks, Devils Lake, Minot, New Rockford, Bismarck, and Williston, N. Dak.; Bainville and Great Falls, Mont.; Spokane, Yakima, and Walla Walla, Wash.; Pocatello, Idaho; and Pendleton, Ore.

The two farm crops that have made the greatest demand upon the Farm Labor Bureau are wheat (with the closely accompanying crops of rye and oats) and cotton. Wheat and cotton require distinctly different classes of seasonal labor. Two independent bodies of men, each running into many thousands, must be recruited and distributed to meet labor demands which reach almost across the country.

Many things enter into the handling of harvest labor, such as labor shortage, high transportation rates, low wages, floods, drought,

hailstorms, etc. During the year under review for a period of at least two weeks heavy floods delayed the harvest in the big wheat sections of northern Oklahoma and south-central Kansas, which added additional responsibility to the Farm Labor Bureau, as the work had to be done with great rapidity. However, I am glad to state that the harvest moved forward with smoothness and dispatch, and the largest area ever covered by this service was cared for and no grain was lost.

Cotton picking started in the extreme southern counties of the Rio Grande Valley of Texas about July 1 and will continue in the plains and panhandle section, with favorable weather conditions, until about the close of December. The cotton picking season is in progress from four and one-half to five months.

In order to provide service for the inland territory, special funds were allotted to the Spokane office. By reason of the excellent work performed by this office, the agricultural interests of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho are asking that a permanent Farm Labor Bureau be established at Spokane, and I would recommend that an office be established there. With your approval I purpose, if funds are available, to establish several additional Farm Labor Bureaus for next season's work. There should be a Farm Labor Bureau opened in Mississippi at the most strategic point, which would probably be Jackson; also one at Denver, Colo., and in order to give service to Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and Wyoming an office should also be located in Utah. The strategic point in Utah, in my opinion, is Salt Lake City. This would also take care of the needs of Nevada and southern Idaho.

Respectfully,

FRANCIS I. JONES,
Director General.

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